

January 24, 2007

“Media Ownership Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. Docket 06-121”

Dual Network Ban

Retain Previous Policy

As years progress, so do people, media, and what’s hot in the marketplace. Due to this, Congress had mandated that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) review its broadcast ownership rules every two years to benefit the public interests.

In June 2006, the FCC took another look at their broadcast ownership rules and replaced, revised, retained, and amended all six. As released by the FCC in 2003, www.pbs.org posted their announcement stating that, “the limits on broadcast ownership are carefully balanced to protect diversity, localism, and competition. They also promote a vibrant marketplace of ideas, promote vigorous competition, and ensure that broadcasters continue to serve the needs and interests of their communities.” I believe the Dual Network Ban Policy passed in 2003 still fulfills the FCC’s requirements, thus leading to my opinion to retain the policy in 2006.

Originally produced in 1946, the Dual Network Ban Rule prohibited entity from maintaining more than a single radio station. In the 1996 Telecommunication Act, Congress relaxed this recent rule to allow major networks to create new networks. In 2001, the rule was further relaxed by allowing a major network to purchase an emerging network (like WB or UPN). Today, the Dual Network Ban allows common ownership of multiple broadcast networks, but:

PROHIBITS a merger between or among the “**top four**” networks, i.e., ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC.

By prohibiting this merge, competition and diversity in the television advertising and program acquisition market is promoted. It also promotes localism by preserving power between networks and affiliates. The FCC announcement also says that “the rule was eliminated and two of the top four networks were to merge, affiliates of those two networks would have fewer networks to turn to for affiliation,” and too much power.

Steven Barnett also argues in, *Media Ownership Policies: Pressures for change and implications*, that “a diverse media are an indispensable part of the democratic process. They provide the multiplicity of voice and an opinion

that informs the public, influences opinion, and engenders political debate....if one voice become too powerful, the process is placed in jeopardy and democracy is damaged. With this said, the Dual Action Ban Rule

helps *constrain the power of the corporate media giants* such as:

Viacom:	(CBS)
News Corporation:	(FOX)
General Electric:	(NBC)
Walt Disney:	(ABC)

Even though NBC and Fox pleaded with FCC to eliminate several of the current rules, Dan Podwil agrees in Quill Magazine's article, "Odds and Ends" that, "Too few people will control too much."

With thousands of channels to choose from, these giants control 75 percent of production of primetime viewing. Combining **any** two of them would be absolutely absurd. It will not only decrease choices, but keep the American public thinking, doing, and believing the same things. In the U.S. we want individuals to stand out and take different views on ideas. If the top giants merge, there will be too much power, like Steven and the FCC state, making that tremendously hard to do.

When first deciding on Dual Network Ban Rule, I thought of my hometown, and favorite place in the world, Chicago. If you want competition, diversity, and choice, this is the place to be! Being a coffee addict, I've tried every coffee and coffee shop in the area. My four favorites include Starbucks, Chi-Town Latte's, Dunkin' Doughnuts, and The "CHI"LLER. Although at times I believed it would be easier if they decided to merge, it would change everything!

I don't want the same coffee all the time, just like I don't want the same news and TV. Sooner or later the coffee will become boring, and eventually turn me away toward another coffee shop. Americans like "choice" and the ability to "choose" what they want and when we want it. By merging, this not only eliminates that, but goes against the Supreme Court's assumption of the First Amendment that, "the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is *essential* to the welfare of the public."

Merging NBC with CBS, or FOX with ABC, would be illogical, affecting not only the people, but competition, and the networks in a negative way. "The Media

are the modern-day American Town Square,” as Virginia Risken, President of the Writer's Guild of America says, “ it is the place where people from different backgrounds and points of view share their stories and the public learns about the world.” We want the public learning from a variety of sources, and this would occur by networks remaining competitive in finding and getting us the best story available. With this all said, the Federal Communications Committee should retain *The Dual Network Ban Policy* for this upcoming year.

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